

Sermon Preached
at
S. Luke's Church, Germantown
by the Rector
on the Occasion of the Blessing of the Tablet
in Memory of
William Frost Schneidt
The Second Sunday after Trinity
June 25, 1933



WILLIAM FROST SCHNEIDT

SEXTON OF THIS CHURCH

1907-1933

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"A DOORKEEPER IN THE HOUSE OF MY GOD"

IT is a curious fact, but unquestionably true, that self-centeredness, self-satisfaction, produces an attitude of destructive depreciation toward others. We see this constantly in our world of today. Egoistic, self-centered writers will tear down the characters of men and women whom we have been accustomed to hold in honor. Every day, people will ignore the virtues and good qualities of their neighbors, and will seek and stress their faults and failings. Selfishness makes us "virtue-conscious" *only of ourselves*. It is altogether too rarely that we see greatness in the lives of those about us. We not only stress the common clay in our leaders and public men, but we fail to get beyond "seeing in the large" the flaws and imperfections in those who live with us daily. It is a great experience to discover, again and again, as David Grayson so quaintly portrays, "the beauty of the near and the charm of the common",—to see the glory of what Keble calls "the common round, the trivial task,"—a great experience indeed, that we too often miss.

It is because of this that I would have you think a few moments now of the success of one in our own generation. We shall put aside any tendency to minimize or ignore the virtues of one we knew well and whose imperfections we therefore knew. We shall not, however, indulge in sentimental excesses, as is commonly done by many today as they would atone to the departed for their lack of true sentiment toward

them when in the flesh. It is not our aim to make such a eulogy of William Schneidt; rather, we would think of and recognize true merit; aiming not only for his praise, but more, for our spiritual good.

Two things stand out pre-eminently in his life;—above all a tremendous devotion and loyalty, first of all to the Church and for what the Church stands. It was such a devotion as can be only in those who have found and known truth so real and vital to themselves that they find it almost impossible to understand why others do not know and can not know it also. Out of this devotion came all that loving care and concern for every part of the church, her fabric and appointments. Of course, therefore, the church must be spotless, every candle straight and well trimmed, every book and cushion in the pews in order; and those who might be careless in the use of the church's property would be strictly checked, for devotion could not permit such.

Associated with this devotion to the Church, grew a like one to the people of the Parish,—a desire to be of service to them, and always ready to minister to them. This came out most strongly in times of death. For example, he would know no limits of personal attention to a body resting in the Crypt Chapel, and often in the case of one poor and with no one to provide, he would bring out of his never-

failing store some little crucifix and clasp it in the hands. An old parishioner may have left a special devotional book in the pew occupied for many years,—this he would quietly slip to rest with the owner. Such instances could be multiplied almost without end. Because of this devotion to the people of the Parish, he never wearied of telling, in most remarkable detail, of those who had gone on, and on every great day he would remember them in some special way. For instance, on Palm Sunday, one would see pieces of palm on many graves in the churchyard. He knew they would want it. How welcomed and thanked he must have been by them!

He had a concern for the detail of life and welfare, a sincere personal interest in anyone who belonged to the Parish, and it was because he had given himself so intensely to the Church.

One more thing in this connection: Often, at the beginning of my rectorship, I was somewhat apprehensive. His personal devotion to and love for my predecessor was so unique and might easily have made the newcomer's problem difficult, but never once—in not a single instance—was his loyalty to the new ever lacking; never, in the nearly ten years, was there a single occasion of any such problem. The Rector's Warden, at the time of the new Rector's coming, had a talk with "William", counseling him about the new

relationship, but such counsel proved unnecessary, for William's loyalty was greater than to the Rector—be he one or another. It was, first of all, to the Church,—to S. Luke's Church,—and he could serve lesser loyalties easily and well, for he had given himself so wholly to the great one.

The second great characteristic can be more briefly dealt with, yet it is nevertheless important and remarkable. With all this professional devotion to the vocation of Sexton,—for such he thought and made the office—there was a very unusual non-professional attitude and practice in his personal religion. Never, at the many weekday Services during Lent, or a Mission, did he light up the church and go away to rest until time to return after the Service; but always he would be found at his pew, taking his part in the Service, his lips moving in prayer, or devoutly singing the hymns. Before the early Mass on Sundays, after opening the church, uncovering the altar, and lighting the sanctuary lamps, he would retire to the back of the church, where the Priest, on his arrival, would always see him, kneeling, making preparation for his Communion.

There are many lessons for us all in such an example:

First,—to all Sextons and especially to those who follow him here, he leaves a very high ideal. He lifted what could be made a menial task of janitor to a high vocation. He made of the Sexton's office one of dignity and honor,—in fact, as one of the lesser Orders in the Church's ministry.

Second,—to those of us who occupy official position, there is a special example in his personal spirit of worship. It is very easy for clergy and choir and servers to become official, professional, impersonal,—to forget the great in the technical performance of the lesser duties of their offices. It is, indeed, a privilege and a great incentive to have him who was "the door-keeper of the House" so devout in his worship.

Third,—to all of us,—to you in the pews,—to each one of us,—there is a great inspiration to give our best. Each has his vocation in the Household of God, and, whatever it may be, we must give ourselves more fully, loyally, sincerely, and devoutly to the Church,—Our Lord's Body.

We often fail in loyalty and devotion in our service to the Church. Though we may be called as workers in some Guild or to some position in the Parish life, we fail in our service. It has too little of "serve" in it and too much of "self"; it is not "service", but rather "self-ice".

William did not fail (thanks be to God), and as we meditate on his success and our failures in service, shall we not lay firm hold upon the secret. It is not *service* that we are to give. It is, first of all and above all, *ourselves*. Service, without the gift of self;—service, that is not an outcome of the gift of self,—is as clanging brass! But, to give ourselves, transforms daily work into a joy and a glory, and makes life's end, a triumph song.

